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ABSTRACT

The Job Corps offers a complete range of human resource development to disadvantaged youth. Its success in improving the employment opportunities and earnings of participants has been significant. With the improvements envisioned under the current expansion proposals, the program will become even more effective in providing jobs and career opportunities for youth. (Author/EB)

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The Job Corps– Cornerstone of Youth Employment and Training Efforts

U.S. Department of Labor
Employment and Training Administration
Office of Youth Programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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U.S. Department of Labor
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Employment and Training Administration
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Building On a Solid Foundation

The Job Corps is a cornerstone of our Nation's employment and training efforts, providing the most disadvantaged youth with intensive services aimed at significantly improving their lifetime employment and earning prospects. It is a program that works. Over more than a decade of operations, the Job Corps has become increasingly effective, and there is convincing evidence of its favorable impact on youth with severe impediments to employment. There are exciting possibilities for doing even better. The Job Corps is not a rigid programmatic approach, but a flexible instrument which can be adapted to changing conditions in order to best serve disadvantaged youth.

The Carter Administration is doubling the Job Corps. This decision is based on a commitment to provide meaningful assistance to those most in need, a judgment that the Job Corps is an effective mechanism to deliver such assistance, and a belief that new approaches can be implemented to make the program still more effective. The expansion currently underway seeks to achieve 44,000 slots under contract by the end of fiscal year 1978, with more than 36,000 enrollees on board. This ambitious expansion, coupled with the wide-ranging initiatives authorized by the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA) of 1977, will significantly improve employment and training opportunities for young people, especially minority and disadvantaged youth whose problems are most serious.

The Carter Administration seeks broad public understanding and participation in this effort. The Department of Labor has issued a Planning Charter for YEDPA in a unique attempt "to open administrative decisionmaking to public scrutiny and to explain government actions in understandable terms." This document supplements the Planning Charter, focusing on the Job Corps--explaining its role in serving the disadvantaged, its record of performance, and the improvements which are envisioned.

The Job Corps offers a complete range of human resource development services, usually in a residential setting. The services are comprehensive, combining basic education and vocational training with other activities fostering self-realization. But the approach is individualized, with assistance tailored to the needs of each participant.

A New Life

When a corpsmember arrives at a Job Corps center, he or she begins a new kind of life. As early as possible, the strengths, weaknesses, and goals of the new corpsmembers are assessed. A schedule is established to respond to this spectrum of need, and individual progress is continually evaluated. Corpsmembers are assigned to comfortable quarters and given responsibility for their maintenance. Prior to joining the Job Corps, many enrollees had not seen a doctor or

dentist for months or even years. And some had never been to one. All corpsmembers, therefore, receive comprehensive medical, dental and mental health services, including physical examinations, immunizations, out-patient visits and essential hospital care. The corpsmembers can expect nutritious meals served in the center cafeteria. He or she will take part in physical education classes, hobby groups, and student government. On weekends, the corpsmember can visit nearby communities for recreation and religious services.

Range of Assistance

A range of assistance is provided to improve future employability. Under the guidance of educators, classroom teachers, and instructors--some from industry and labor unions--Job Corps enrollees can progress from performing at the lowest grade levels to acquiring their high school equivalency certificates, and some Job Corpsmembers go on to apprenticeships in skilled trades or even to college.

The Job Corps' general education program includes reading, mathematics, language and study skills, consumer education, advanced general education, English, English as a second language, home and family living, health education, and orientation to the world of work. The program concentrates on using the best instructional materials and techniques available, including those developed by the Job Corps specifically for disadvantaged youth.

The materials and techniques permit students to proceed at their own pace. Because a great many jobs require a high school diploma or its equivalent to qualify for employment, the Job Corps has undertaken to provide able corpsmembers with the information, concepts, and general knowledge needed to complete successfully the American Council on Education's High School General Educational Development (GED) test. Approximately 4,000 corpsmembers receive their GED certificates each year.

The Job Corps' vocational training programs prepare young men and women for occupations with favorable job prospects. Corpsmembers are trained in automotive and machinery repair, food services, electronics assembly, electrical appliance repair, construction and metal trades, transportation and heavy equipment operation, health occupations, clerical and business skills, and a range of other occupations where there is the promise of job opportunities.

From the day an enrollee arrives at a Job Corps center, a program is planned to help him or her move on to a good job. There are a range of placement efforts upon termination. The Job Corps has its own placement officers and uses outside organizations, including the Employment Service, Job Corps GATE (Graduate Aid to Employment) Houses located in six cities with heavy concentrations of returning corpsmembers, and the

unions involved in Job Corps training. Volunteer groups such as JACS (Joint Action in Community Service) and WICS (Women in Community Service) provide the support services former corpsmembers often need to adjust to the world of work. Most of the above organizations, as well as CETA prime sponsors, are also involved in recruiting youth for the Job Corps.

Improving Future Opportunities

Such comprehensive services and residential support are costly, but the severely disadvantaged youth who participate in the Job Corps need such help. More than half of those enrolled are black and another tenth, Spanish speaking; 85 percent are school dropouts, and less than half have achieved a sixth grade reading level; half are from families or five or more persons; and three-fourths of the families have annual incomes of less than $5,000.

The chances are limited for such youth because of the obstacles they face in the labor market and the problems they may have already encountered. The Job Corps is intended to serve those youth who have the fewest chances of success on their own. But this does not mean that they lack potential. The Job Corps assumes--and its many success cases demonstrate--that the discouraging statistical profile of the average recruit gives no measure of what a particular young person's real capacity for learning and earning may be. The combination of a positive environment and meaningful education and training opportunities provides enrollees a better chance to realize their potentials.

There are too few options for such disadvantaged youth. Other programs have provided an increasing number of short-term work experience slots for youth, but human resources development efforts, which emphasize training and education for youth, have not expanded over the last decade, while the employment problems of youth have intensified. In fiscal year 1976, the Job Corps trained as many disadvantaged dropout youth as the remainder of the skill training programs in the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act system. Together, these remedial efforts reached only a small portion of the universe of need.

The Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act will add roughly 200,000 slots at the $1 billion spending level in fiscal year 1978, but most will serve in-school youth, while some will serve nondisadvantaged youth. In other words, only a small proportion will provide comprehensive human resource development services to the type of disadvantaged, out-of-school youth assisted by the Job Corps. While the work experience opportunities which have expanded in the last decade are critically important, they have an immediate rather than long-term impact in most cases. The Job Corps thus remains the primary tool for providing our most disadvantaged youth with improved future opportunities.

Demonstrated Effectiveness

The Job Corps works. On the average, participants significantly improve their employment and earnings. Educational and vocational skills are polished. Attitudes and behavior mature positively.

In fiscal year 1976, three-fifths of all Job Corps terminees for whom followup information was available were placed in employment. Another fourth of the terminees returned to school or entered the Armed Forces. Followup information was unavailable for one-fifth of all terminees. Under the unlikely assumption that none of these were placed, the placement rate was still nearly 70 percent. This is a very impressive placement total relative to other employment and training efforts for disadvantaged youth.

Schooling and Jobs

Job Corps improves earnings as well as employment prospects. Among fiscal year 1976 enrollees, only two-fifths had worked previously, receiving a median wage of $2.23. Among the three-fifths of terminees placed in jobs, the average hourly wage after Job Corps participation was $2.57. The average gain for individuals who worked before and after the Job Corps was $.50 per hour.

This does not mean that all Job Corps terminees secure "good" jobs where they will remain for their careers. The Job Corps does not alter labor market realities. Among nonwhite males overall, for instance, a fifth of those age 16 to 19 who are employed one month will be unemployed or outside the labor force the next. The Job Corps improves the stability of employment, but it does not eliminate turnover. Not all completers secure positions which will lead directly to lifelong opportunities. However, few people continue in their first jobs for the rest of their worklives. The important point is that on the average the Job Corps does improve both immediate and long term prospects. For a significant segment of participants, the program is a positive experience which may make all the difference in the world.

The noneconomic benefits are also substantial. The education program in the Job Corps produces demonstrable results. The tested educational gain rates have averaged 1.7 months of achievement in reading for every month in the program, and 1.9 in mathematics, compared with the .5 gain per month most of the participants averaged when in school. A tenth of Job Corps enrollees secure a GED during their period of participation.

Improved Attitudes

There are other positive impacts. Surveys indicate improved attitudes toward marriage and child raising. Participants tend to care more about staying in shape, keeping out of trouble, and getting along with the family. The self-perceptions of corpsmembers tend to be validated by those who knew them before and after their Job Corps experiences and by several other manifestations. For

instance, police involvement is reduced for completers, and chances of success in the military are increased.

But the Job Corps also has an immediate impact. Disadvantaged youth are removed from what are frequently debilitating home or social environments. For instance, a recent study comparing enrollees with a control group found that while participants had somewhat higher arrest rates prior to enrollment, the rate during enrollment was one-fourth that of youths still out on the street. Participants are housed, fed, and given medical and dental care, which benefit them personally, as well as relieving their low-income families from the burden of support. Further, the provision of constructive options in the Job Corps reduces the competition for the limited number of other employment and training opportunities in the community.

Benefits Exceed Costs

There is no way to sum up easily these accomplishments. Over the years, much attention has been given to benefit/cost analyses, which seek to put a dollar value on the benefits and to compare them with program costs, to determine whether the Job Corps investment is "profitable" to society. The results have been inconclusive. The most careful and technically proficient analysis was based on the experience of terminees during the year 1966, in the 6 months after they left the program. Wages increased for corpsmembers relative to similar youths who were accepted but did not enter the Corps. Projecting these gains over the future worklife, and comparing their current value to costs, suggested that the investment had a rate of profitable return somewhere between 5 and 45 percent. When benefits were valued by measuring the education gains of the corpsmembers and relating these to projected income by known education/earnings ratios, there were similar favorable results.

Subsequent data raised questions about the durability of the Job Corps gains. Different assumptions were utilized which produced less favorable benefit/cost ratios. Several studies attempted to compare Job Corps participants with other youth in the population, but since the program served the most severely disadvantaged, the findings were questionable.

These analyses are all quite dated, based on 1960's experience. Since then, the Job Corps performance has improved substantially. The same methodologies which may have raised questions about cost effectiveness in earlier years now provide grounds for a very positive assessment. From fiscal year 1967 to 1976, the per man-year Job Corps cost measured in constant dollars was cut in half. The job placement rate held firm even though the unemployment rate for 16 to 19 year-old youth rose by half. At the same time, the positive termination rate--including placement, returns to school, and entry into the Armed Forces--rose despite the much smaller number of Armed Forces inductees and the reduced number of jobs available.

The theoretical impact of these changes on the benefit/cost ratio are staggering. Since the chances of employment of Job Corps terminees remained constant while those of similar nonparticipants declined, benefits of participation clearly increased. The decline in real costs would, of itself, double the benefit/cost ratio. If the benefits merely equalled costs in the 1960's, they would now be more than double.

Whether the Job Corps is more profitable than other social investments remains uncertain given the many difficulties in assessing program impacts. But, over the years, the Job Corps has been more carefully scrutinized than any other major social program, and there is every reason to believe that benefits do, in fact, substantially exceed costs. There can be no debate that the Job Corps substantially benefits its participants, who, in most cases, would have few other opportunities.

Improvements in the Job Corps

More than a decade's experience with the Job Corps has suggested ways in which the program and its approach can be substantially improved. Notable changes have, in fact, been made in recent years, despite severe resource constraints. Improvements will be built into the expansion effort, so that the Job Corps of the future will be even better than the existing program.

The success formula is not mysterious. The Job Corps works when:

- First, there are direct linkages into jobs with career potential which participants could not have secured on their own.
- Second, training, education and other services beyond the basic, introductory level are oriented specifically towards the requirements for such jobs.
- Third, there are multiple options for participants allowing them to advance at their own pace and in the directions best suited to their interests and abilities.
- Fourth, career-oriented training is directed to more mature youth who have demonstrated their commitment and will be able to handle and secure the jobs for which they are trained.
- Fifth, the environment in the centers parallels that in the "real world" as much as possible, and adequate transitional services are provided when corpsmembers return to their communities.

The Job Corps has applied this success formula in recent years, accounting for much of the continuing improvement in performance. Training contracts have been developed with construction unions to provide vocational instructors in Job Corps centers and to assist in subsequent placement efforts. The results have been a very high training-related placement rate in well paying jobs. Specialized training components have also been developed for marine cooks, stewards, and transportation clerks, with the promise of high-wage employment at the end of the road.

The Job Corps environment has also been improved. Long distance relocations of participants have been largely eliminated. Coeducational facilities have been expanded as rapidly as possible. Through the use of satellite centers and work experience assignments in neighboring communities, the isolation from the world of work has been reduced.

Expanding the Job Corps

The expansion of the Job Corps provides the resources and opportunity to accelerate these improvements. The following new elements are central to the expansion plan.

1. *Strengthened Job Linkages.* From its union-based preapprentice programs, Job Corps has learned the value of direct linkages between training and work. Therefore, a major thrust in the expansion will be to achieve a closer collaboration between trainers and employers. Several arrangements are already being developed. For instance, the all-volunteer Armed Forces provides attractive employment opportunities--with starting jobs paying in the neighborhood of $6,500. Many volunteers are rejected because they lack education, have correctable health problems, or may simply represent too much of an attrition risk. Meanwhile, the Armed Forces have encountered difficulties in meeting their recruiting needs and will have increasing problems as civilian youth programs are expanded. Given the evidence that Job Corps completers do quite well in the Armed Forces, specialized service-oriented training components could provide stable, qualified recruits while offering opportunities which might otherwise be closed to disadvantaged youth.

   There are many other ways in which job linkages may be promoted. Attempts will be made to secure jobs with Government contractors. Large employers will be encouraged to "adopt" Job Corps centers to provide training which will be directly tied to available jobs in the firms. Expanded union training and employment linkages will be developed. In major urban centers, work experience components will be added to provide residential support during the corpsmembers' readjustment to the world of work.

   Linkages are being explored with the transportation, health, environmental, and communications industries to train for expanding jobs. Programs are being considered to train corpsmembers for paraprofessional positions in the employment and training system, including Job Corps itself. Finally, the Job Corps may be used as a means for relocating youth from areas of high unemployment to growth areas where the skills they learn in the Job Corps will be in greater demand.

2. *Advanced Training.* Advanced career training and education opportunities will be provided. Several thousand slots will be

developed in community and junior colleges and post-secondary vocational schools. These will provide technical training and academic credit to the more mature enrollees who have demonstrated their capability in the regular Job Corps program. Other advanced, career-oriented courses will also be offered. The program will then become a system with multiple options in which each individual can move as far and as fast as abilities permit. Disadvantaged youth who may not have chosen to enroll in the Job Corps because they had already acquired basic competencies would be attracted to these promising educational and career options.

3. *Improved Environment.* A continued effort will be made to improve the Job Corps environment. Upgrading and modernization of facilities in existing centers is now underway. Coeducational programs will be stressed, with an emphasis on serving female heads of households who are more mature and committed to bettering themselves. The development of work experience opportunities and a progression of assignments will allow movement between centers and will avoid isolation and separation from the real world. Additionally, steps are being taken to raise allowances to make them more comparable to other training stipends.

The Future

As a result of these changes, the Job Corps will be a different and improved program at the end of the expansion. With expanded career options, it will appeal to mature, upwardly mobile disadvantaged youths while also providing broader opportunities to those with the most severe barriers to employment, who will continue to be served. The mixing should have positive effects on enrollees, while also making the Job Corps more desirable to communities. With new centers and staffs and improved materials, the Job Corps environment should be more attractive and recruitment should be enhanced. Completion rates should continue to improve as the benefits of staying with the Job Corps are increased. The strengthened employment linkages should be reflected in higher training-related placement rates, as well as increased wage gains. Most critically, the lifelong impacts of the program should be markedly increased.

Clearly, the future looks promising. The Job Corps is presently an effective mechanism for helping our most disadvantaged youth improve their futures. The program can and will become even more effective as the expansion plans are realized--providing not just jobs but career opportunities.

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